

AI for people, applying technology for social good

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming our lives, including how we work. The question is not whether AI will change jobs – it already does – but whether this transformation will be shaped in ways that advance social justice, decent work and shared prosperity. As India hosts the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi – the first of its kind in the Global South, coinciding with the World Day of Social Justice observed on February 20 – we take the opportunity to call for a human-centred AI that serves people and drives inclusive social development.

By its scale and impact, India's AI journey stands at a critical moment, offering a compelling laboratory for what lies ahead. The country now has the world's largest share of monthly active users of the ChatGPT mobile application and one of the largest user bases for advanced AI platforms. By 2030, AI could generate more than three million new technology jobs in India while reshaping over 10 million existing ones. India illustrates both the scale of transformation and the promise of responsible AI deployment for social justice, job creation, economic inclusion and growth.

Divided discourse

Globally, debates on AI are increasingly polarised. Some narratives emphasise the potential for surging productivity growth, while others focus on job losses, rising inequality and governance gaps. Yet, both perspectives overlook a fundamental truth: technology alone does not determine outcomes, human beings do. This is why the way AI is governed – through inclusive institutions, social dialogue and democratic participation – matters as much as the technology itself.

When deployed inclusively and responsibly, AI can help reduce inequalities, expand access to training, employment and social protection, and improve workplace safety and conditions – benefiting workers and enterprises alike. To support this agenda, the International Labour Organization (ILO) is working together with India and other partners of the Global Coalition for Social Justice, which includes a global network of AI observatories to strengthen evidence and



Mansukh Mandaviya

is Union Minister of Labour and Employment, Government of India



Gilbert F. Hounqbo

is Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO)

Artificial intelligence must help advance social justice, inclusive work, and equitable growth

support decision-making. Evidence from the ILO – the leading normative agency on labour standards – suggests that AI will profoundly reshape the world of work, not by replacing jobs wholesale, but by transforming roles in ways that can enhance productivity, drive innovation and improve organisational performance. Around one in four workers globally is employed in occupations with some level of exposure to generative AI, yet more roles are likely to be transformed rather than replaced. To maximise these opportunities, effective policy and governance frameworks are essential, along with meaningful worker participation and strong social dialogue to ensure that innovation promotes equitable and inclusive outcomes across the world of work.

Tech for good, AI impact

There are compelling examples of how technologies, including AI, can strengthen social justice and decent work. For instance, India's e-Shram platform, which enables over 315 million informal workers to register for social protection schemes. With the ILO's technical collaboration on the inclusion of major central and states schemes, India has increased its social protection coverage from 19% in 2015 to 64.3% in 2025. Building on this success, major investments, such as Microsoft's \$17.5 billion commitment to AI diffusion, are supporting the integration of AI into e-Shram and the National Career Service portal. This approach has the potential to benefit India's informal workers by improving access to jobs, skills development and social protection.

Aligned with the vision of leveraging AI for inclusive and human-centred development, the Government of India has been proactive in preparing the country for the future of work by advancing transformative technologies through initiatives such as the AI Mission, National Quantum Mission, Anusandhan National Research Fund and the Research, Development and Innovation Fund.

Recognising that technological progress must translate into inclusive growth and quality

employment, the Union Budget 2026-27 has announced the formation of a High-Powered 'Education to Employment and Enterprise' Standing Committee to assess the impact of emerging technologies, including AI, on employment and skill requirements. It will also recommend targeted measures to embed AI education, from the school-level onwards, and enable AI-driven matching of workers with jobs and training opportunities. Through these forward-looking measures, India is positioning itself not only to harness AI for social good domestically but also to serve as a model for the Global South in building an inclusive, future-ready digital economy.

AI access remains unequal

AI exposure around the world is, however, uneven with persistent gaps in access to technology and skills across regions and within countries, genders, age groups and social categories. In low-income countries, only about 11.5% of employment is exposed to generative AI, compared with roughly one-third in high-income economies. These differences reflect variations in economic structures and underscore

the need for tailored policy approaches rather than one-size-fits-all solutions. Targeted public investment in skills development, digital infrastructure and social protection, alongside international collaboration and solidarity, are essential to ensure that AI fosters greater inclusion and expands opportunity across all countries.

The convergence of the AI Impact Summit and the World Day of Social Justice is a reminder that technology should primarily serve workers and societies. AI is moving faster than our institutions, but it does not absolve us from our collective responsibility. The task ahead is to align technological ambition with social purpose so that innovation strengthens trust, inclusion and dignity at work. Through such an approach, AI will not only reaffirm why work matters but also its intrinsic value as a source of dignity and social cohesion, and its fundamental role in building peaceful and socially just societies.

